

Maine Climate Action **NOW!**

To: Maine Legislature Committee on Judiciary
From: Ezra Sassaman, Advocacy Coordinator, Maine Climate Action Now
Date: February 18, 2026
Re: LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Committee on Judiciary, my name is Ezra Sassaman. I live in Bar Harbor and represent Maine Climate Action Now (MCAN), a coalition of eighteen nonprofit organizations united by a shared desire for transformative action in response to the climate crisis.

MCAN stands in solidarity with the Penobscot Nation, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation and recognizes there is no climate or environmental justice without the inclusion of the tribes. The Wabanaki Nations have a long tradition of stewardship of natural resources and the land. Their perspectives and traditional knowledge are crucial to realizing a future where humans can live together in harmony with other species and with the natural world.

As it stands, however, these Nations are not on equal footing with 570 other federally recognized tribes across the country. They are the only ones that must be explicitly written into each federal law to benefit from it. As a result, the Wabanaki Nations' economic growth has been severely restricted. Between 1989 and 2018, citizens of Wabanaki Nations saw an average income increase of only 9% compared to 61% for other tribal citizens.¹ To make matters worse, the failures of the 1980 Settlement Act have fallen on children in Wabanaki communities, who suffer poverty rates of over 40% to nearly 77%, compared to Maine's overall rate of around 15%.²

Thousands of Mainers and hundreds of organizations focused on environmental justice, social justice, organized labor, alongside faith-based groups support Wabanaki self-determination. We are united by a shared vision for basic fairness, undoing the mistakes of history, and realizing a better future together.

For these reasons, MCAN urges you to vote "ought-to-pass" on LD 785. Thank you for your time.

¹ Sarah Grucza. "[Maine policy restricts tribal sovereignty finds new research](#)". *Harvard Gazette*. December 6, 2022. Accessed February 18, 2026.

² Lura Jackson. "[Wabanaki sovereignty would benefit all Maine residents, study finds](#)." *Maine Monitor*. April 29, 2023. Accessed February 18, 2026.